

DEM: REDUCE WATER/SEWER USE IN FLOODED AREAS; ALL CONNECTIONS OF BASEMENT SUMP PUMPS TO SANITARY SEWER SYSTEMS ARE ILLEGAL.

At the request of local communities, the Department of Environmental Management reminds state residents that the discharge of sump pumps and roof down spouts into sanitary sewer systems are illegal. Per a long-standing rule of the state's water quality regulations, "no person shall discharge storm water, gutter runoff, sump discharges, or street runoff to a treatment works designed to receive only wastewater."

This prohibition is in place to prevent or minimize the overflow of raw sewage, and so protect public health and the environment.

Furthermore, the DEM urges large water users in Warwick and West Warwick to voluntarily reduce or suspend activities that result in the discharge of water into already overwhelmed and in some cases submerged sewer systems. The wastewater treatment facilities in these two communities are flooded; four sewage pumping stations in Warwick and one in West Warwick are also disabled due to catastrophic flooding. Wastewater treatment systems and sewer systems throughout the state are continuing to experience high flows or failures, such as the Pontiac Ave. sewage pumping station in Cranston.

Warwick, West Warwick and state officials now estimate affected sewer collection systems and pump stations in those two communities to be able to handle all flows, allowing for a return to normal use of water, by this weekend. To do so, flooded or damaged pumping stations will require manual bypass pumping, which is being planned for and will be implemented as soon as falling flood levels allow. The timing of such flood level reductions will vary from area to area.

Resumption of full wastewater treatment at the treatment facilities themselves will take significantly longer in many communities as systems seek to reestablish the physical and biological systems necessary for normal wastewater treatment.

The Warwick Wastewater Treatment Facility normally treats some 5 million gallons daily of residential and commercial sewerage, with West Warwick treating some 7 million gallons daily. Statewide, nineteen wastewater treatment facilities treat approximately 100 million gallons every day.

While residential users in Warwick and West Warwick are also asked to reduce water and sewer use as possible, DEM strongly urges all larger scale water users on public sewers to assist in cleanup efforts and protect public health by reducing discharges to their sewer systems, which will help reduce the amount of raw sewage in flood and river waters.

Likewise, the DEM is reminding residents and commercial establishments that it has been and remains illegal for sump pump discharges to be tied into public sanitary sewers. Such pumping systems should be diverted to yards or, if appropriate, stormwater collection systems, to reduce

flows from sanitary sewer systems.

As a general reminder, because flood waters can contain unhealthy substances, including raw sewage and other hazardous substances, every effort should be made to limit contact with flood water due to potentially elevated levels of contaminants.

During heavy rains, sanitary sewers may overflow into floodwaters. Avoid contact with floodwaters due to potential contamination with raw sewage and other hazardous substances. Avoid swimming and boating in floodwaters, and do not allow children or pets to wade or play in floodwaters.

EPA offers the following guidelines for those in contact with flood water:

- Wash your hands before drinking and eating;
- Wash frequently using soap -- especially disinfecting soap;
- Do not smoke;
- Limit direct contact with contaminated flood water;
- Pay attention to any cuts or open wounds and limit exposure to flood water;
- Pay attention to any unusual symptoms and report them to health care professionals;
- Keep vaccinations current.

The public and emergency response personnel should follow guidelines from federal, state and local health and safety professionals. Early symptoms from exposure to contaminated flood water may include upset stomach, intestinal problems, headache and other flu-like discomfort. Anyone experiencing these and any other problems should immediately seek medical attention.

General precautions to reduce contact with contaminated flood include routine washing with soap, and not eating or drinking while in contact with flood water. These precautions can significantly help reduce potential exposure and illness. Anyone with open-wounds or pre-existing conditions should seek immediate consultation to prevent possible illness.

Notify local authorities or the DEM at 222-4700 during working hours at or 222-3070 after 4PM or during state office shutdowns if you are aware of oil spills or other potential contamination of flood waters by chemicals.

For information online about floods flood cleanups, visit the EPA site
<http://www.epa.gov/naturaldisasters/flooding.html>